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# STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

"TO GO, OR NOT TO GO. THAT IS THE QUESTION": THE UTILITY OF EXPEDITIONARY WARFARE IN THE NEXT CENTURY

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JACOB M. MCFERREN United States Army

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# Lieutenant Colonel Jacob M. McFerren United States Army

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# Colonel Tom Carstens, USMC Project Advisor

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#### **ABSTRACT**

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The Cold War is over and America's military finds itself beset at home and abroad with conflicts that threaten its very being. Budget cuts, force reductions, and inter-service bickering attack the core of the services while sundry small contingencies catapult operational tempo to the lunatic fringe for those who are left. All the while the services have essentially entered the twenty-first century carrying the same weight of the twentieth- century formations and strategy that made them what they are. The world has changed dramatically, seemingly new but in actuality returning to a time experienced prior to the emergence of the superpower standoff of the last fifty years. But regardless of what is touted on the Potomac, neither the nation's strategy, nor those of the services, have changed to match the brave new world. The revolution in technology which promises the seemingly impossible, a populace that is ever more isolationist, and an economy completely integrated in the rest of the world's only serve to complicate the matter. Merely returning to pre-World War II force levels will not suffice. Not until the very structure of the formations is dramatically revolutionized will we be truly ready to decide where and when -- and more importantly -- if, to intervene.

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Those rules of old discovered, not devised,
Are Nature still, but Nature methodized;
Nature, like liberty, is but restrained
By the same laws which first herself ordained.
Alexander Pope, An Essay on Criticism

#### The Dilemma

The world has changed. Our national strategy has changed. We say our military strategy has changed. However, our basic manner of warfare has not changed. We have, for the most part, prosecuted our wars as joint ventures between the services to overthrow the enemy. After deploying forces, usually as a joint Army/ Navy venture, we built up a base of operations and when ready, attacked -- as separate services -- to destroy the enemy. As Russell Weigley points out in the preface to his book, The American Way of War, it was only when America was weak militarily that our aims in war were limited. The stronger we grew, the more our objective became the overthrow of the enemy. 1 In most cases, there were at least two distinct phases to the prosecution: deployment and employment. Of course there is room for argument in specific instances: the Revolution, the War of 1812 and the Indian Wars immediately come to mind. But the remainder of America's wars fit the general outline of joint deployment /separate employment for the purpose of defeating the enemy, completely. Since we have been blessed as a nation with oceans as borders, it has been us that has taken the fight to the enemy's homeland. And for that we launched expeditions, some small, some huge. Essentially, we went, we saw, we conquered.

Or did we? What did we "fix" for any length of time with the smaller scale expeditions? Did we solve the problems in Mexico, or postpone them? Did we fix the problems in Cuba or postpone them? Nicaragua? Honduras? Haiti? The Philippines? Libya? China? Japan? The list is long. The point is this: these smaller wars were prosecuted through expedition at a time when America was ostensibly pursuing an isolationist policy. We were not trying to colonize or conquer more land or garner riches for the American "realm". The world was a complex, volatile, uncertain, and ambiguous place. As a nation, we were young, confident and determined that our way was the morally superior one. We believed we had moral duty bordering on divine right to spread our way among those oppressed or less fortunate. We struck from over the horizon when threatened. Sometimes we stayed, sometimes we left. Our stays were sometimes protracted, as in the case of Haiti and the Philippines; other times our troops barely left footprints in the sand. Each circumstance was unique; each varied in its success. But we went because ultimately we felt we could not turn our back on the world. After the larger excursions we tried to dissociate ourselves from the outside world, only to be tugged out of our isolationism by world events demanding our attention, threatening our national interests. Each time we hoped that somehow we had changed the world for the better. Each time we were reminded just how fickle the world can be. We could never merely ignore the rest of the world; it is not in our nature no matter how much we would like to do so. It is in our nature to attempt to remedy problems expeditiously, and many times for the last two hundred years this has meant expeditionary warfare. Thus far it has kept the world at bay. We are counting on it to work for at least another couple of decades.

#### **Brave New World**

"During the Cold War we had a vocation; now we have none." Ronald Steel, <u>Temptations of a Superpower</u>

The truth is getting old: we are (and have been) in a new world order. It is not the order we had hoped for, not the kinder, gentler order we wanted and planned for. The new order is more complex, volatile, uncertain and ambiguous than any experienced in many generations. It is perhaps the most complex, volatile, uncertain and ambiguous ever experienced. No subject more baffles the American mind, perplexes our government, or vexes our services. After the Gulf War we seemingly stood as the world's sole remaining super power. But instead of peace breaking out in profusion, we found ourselves surrounded by a seething mass of world upheaval. We had not planned for such a world-wide contingency of this nature. The argument as to whether or not we should have been prepared for this brave new world is probably a futile one. We were not and are not prepared politically, socially, economically, and militarily.

It is dangerous to think of ourselves as the only remaining superpower. While it is true we have the global reach to influence world situations as they arise, we no longer enjoy the clear following we did when the world was bi-polar. The U.S. no longer enjoys the privileged position of being able to announce policy and having the rest of the world (or at least our allies) fall in behind us. They do not; at least not without prodding. What

the world wants is American leadership -- not American hegemony -- and we must understand this crucial distinction.

Before the rest of the world can understand our national priorities we must understand and articulate them, and we don't. Clearly during the Cold War American survival was at stake. During the Cold War a mistake in domestic politics might embarrass us while a mistake in world politics stood a chance of burying us. We therefore had two distinct modus operandi, each more clearly recognizable then than our policies now. Now, unfortunately, the two political operational modes have themselves become confused, blurred into one. Our newest National Military Strategy purports to be one of engagement and enlargement, while at the same time we are closing embassies all over the world! These same embassies opened doors to engagement and enlargement for peaceful military exchanges many times preventing violent military exchanges. In times of peace, however, America looks inward. Domestic politics have always driven foreign policy to a certain degree, but now our franchising to special interest groups has reached a new zenith. Politically we have become introverts in a world who sits wondering what our global priorities are. The other nations in the world want to know what we stand for, what we represent. In many ways they are as baffled, perplexed and vexed as we. Rather than offset each other, this double vexing feeds like hunger on itself until it consumes itself. Confusion seldom breeds stability. What do we (the United States) represent? What are our priorities? Other countries want to know.

Why should we care? Terrorism, drugs, organized crime, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, religious radicalism, economic woes, disease, and environmental degradation all transcend manmade boundaries and all have been and remain potential cause for expeditious action by the U. S.. Today more than ever before the opportunities for deployment to "hotspots" for our military forces are myriad!

# Rules of Old Discovered, Not Devised

"[T]he present U.S. grand strategy is flawed in its assumptions, focused on the wrong strategic goal and dangerous in its likely geopolitical consequences."

Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Premature Partnership"<sup>3</sup>

The new millennium was ushered in by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the bi-polar world with which we had grown so comfortable. The United States fought the battle it had planned and trained and built its military for and around as the minute hand made its last sweep though the 20th century. When the smoke cleared from the hundred hour war few realized the change the world had undergone. Few realized that the world they knew was as gone as surely as if the smoke had carried it away. In our euphoria we missed the irony of having fought the European Plain battle on the Middle Eastern plains ... against a former ally! Some lauded Desert Storm as the first war of the new century, but more and more it appears to have been the last war of the last century. Regardless, we went, we saw, we conquered. In true 20th century fashion, we coalesced with our friends (we were in charge), we joined our sister services (fighting separately), and in a throwback to even earlier warfare, we left the opposing monarch in power. It was a

stunning victory, but not in the revolutionary sense. Our tactics, techniques, and procedures had evolved for over fifty years in response to the opposing tactics, techniques and procedures of our adversary just as dictated in our doctrinal manuals.<sup>4</sup> The mistake was to assume that those formations, tactics, techniques, and procedures would serve us in the new world order. The mistake was to assume we were prepared for the future.

In fact one may argue we went so far as to UN-prepare ourselves militarily, and that we continue to do so with every passing day.<sup>5</sup> But the new world order may not be that different. What we may be experiencing is the re-emergence of old rules of order. Rules that we are merely discovering, as one would uncover an artifact long buried and forgotten. We are not devising the new world; we are not creating it. At this point, we are reacting to it. The challenge we face is how to identify these natural rules of order in the seeming chaos and act to make sense of them: to methodize them in some lasting way. The challenge is coming to grips with the fact that the next century is already seven years old and we are still caught in last century's mode of thinking about war. We must realize that world events may demand more of our time, effort, and money than our previous history of expeditionary forays have offered. Perhaps the most expeditious way is not the most lasting way of dealing with a threat to our national interests. Perhaps we need something new, something more permanent to deal with complex nature of the world's smoldering hotspots. Soldiers and Marines hitting the beach may have worked in the twentieth century but we have already experienced the innate limitations of such operations in the twenty-first century in Lebanon and Somalia.

These new hotspots offer an ever increasing variety of missions and destinations for the deploying forces. By our own extant and emerging doctrine these units will have to be a well-oiled mix of warrior, politician, civil servant, doctor, architect, Samaritan and visionary. Expectations to perform any one, any combination, or all of these roles present challenging training requirements to those involved.

Very few will argue that we will experience another operation on the scale of the Gulf War in the next ten to fifteen years, but even fewer will argue that the military should not be able to react to such a contingency. Exacerbating this dilemma is the political pressure to provide more capital for domestic use by cutting the Defense budget. The only savings to be realized come from force reduction and procurement. Regardless of the real worth to domestic programs, the common belief (some would say misunderstanding) is that many of our domestic woes can be eliminated by reducing the size of the force and reducing procurement for future systems. While this may look good on paper, it ignores the obvious conclusion that increasing missions and potential deployment locations actually argue for more robust, and maybe even larger numbers of forces. We physically cannot "do" another Desert Storm now; the units don't exist. Caught in the dichotomy of increasing missions with decreasing structure and budget our military leaders are in a real "catch 22" when presented with the current two Major Regional Contingencies (MRC) scenario called for by present National Military Strategy. Today, "[t]he core requirement of our [military] strategy is a force capable of fighting and winning two major regional

conflicts nearly simultaneously."<sup>6</sup> The argument as to whether or not the military is capable of dealing with two operations of the size of the Gulf War deployment was largely ignored by hanging hopes for force structure on the "nearly simultaneous" part of the strategy.

The debate over what "nearly simultaneous" really means has already begun. The common response is vague, but most succinctly summed up in a "hold in one, win in the other, win in the first one" concept. This concept relies on a number of assumptions: enough warning, enough time, enough structure, enough willpower. Coupled with the recent *National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* which suggests an increasing tempo of operations on a day to day basis (requiring more troops and money) to further our democratic values and systems one can see easily how diametrically opposed the strategies and the realities are. In a recent twist, the Quadrennial Review Board has decided to answer the question of simultaneity by changing the requirement from being able to respond to two MRCs to being able to respond one Major Theater of War (MTW). The implicit admission hidden in this word-smithing is our current physical inability to respond to two MRCs, simultaneous or not. So many conflicts: so few troops: so little money.

#### **Lost Empires**

More than forty years ago Dean Acheson lectured the British that they had "lost an empire but not yet found a role." In an ironic way, we find many parallels in our situation today. As the U.S. rose to world greatness in the last of the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth centuries, it did so on the back of its military forces. It was the Army who tamed the Wild West, the Navy who cracked the original bamboo curtain surrounding Japan, and the combined Army-Navy team who mounted expeditions to every continent and the far reaches of the globe. Together the Army-Navy team opened the way for economic growth and the spread of American idealism and trade.

It was the armed forces who secured the fledgling nation's right to ply their trade by sea despite marauding pirates from England and "the shores of Tripoli". It was the armed forces who secured the nation's expansion into the southwest and secured economic ventures in Central and South America and the Pacific. It was the armed forces who stood behind the barricades from Peking to Mindanao; from Managua to Port au Prince; from Havana to the shores of Imperial Russia. All expeditions. All for freer trade and access to goods and materiel, and ultimately the economic betterment of the nation.

Our expeditions during W.W.II eventually evolved into occupation forces and from that to security forces. The Cold War gave America an opportunity to export hope for others in the form of political stability, economic aid, and military security. America spent its money on security forces so that the weakened nations in Europe and Asia did not need to. But America did so willingly. After all, we were showing the world

ourselves; we were showing the world American democracy. Ronald Steel calls democracy "... the export product that Americans seem to care about most. Its adaptation by others, at least rhetorically, is treated not only as a tribute to America, but as an endorsement of the nation itself. Our version of democracy, most Americans are convinced, is the model to which all less advantaged peoples aspire." We spent and we spent protecting our allies and our own economic interests. And through all the spending there remained one visible, constant reason to spend: the Russian Communists and their concomitant expansionist theory. We convinced ourselves -- and our allies -- that the Soviets were merely bidding their time waiting for the right moment to attack. Now there is much evidence to call our "defensive' spending into question. There are those who argue that the Soviets never really intended to attack at all; that their massive war machine was for all intents and purposes not an offensive force but a defensive force built to deter an attack by an awesome and definitely offensive NATO (primarily American) force projection military. 10 We built a fifteen division Army, a thirty-six wing Air Force, and nearly realized the dream of a 600 ship Navy. Then we positioned them so as to contain the Soviet threat. No wonder the Soviets were concerned then and remain so today as we tout the defensive nature of an expanded NATO.

# It's the Economy, Stupid!

One fire drives out one fire; one nail, one nail; Rights by rights founder, strengths by strengths do fail. Shakespeare

Ultimately we outspent our ideological opponent "the evil empire" of Soviet Russia in an economic war that left the eastern block countries in economic ruin and the U. S. the world's largest debtor nation. Ironically, the end of the Cold War provides us with a macabre twist. The true winners are those former Axis Powers defeated in W.W.II. Safe under the protective umbrella of American expeditions turned security forces in a forward deployed stance, Germany and Japan have spent their treasure and energy on things economic. We spent our money deploying an expeditionary force to fight for oil primarily used by Japan and Europe. Ultimately, the result has been a boom in economic prosperity especially evident in the Pacific Rim nations. And we have been left with a massive military structure built for the sole purpose of projecting our power overseas to combat another massive military power who might threaten our perceived or purported interests: economic interests of both our allies and ourselves. But there is no threat, no matter how hard we search. Yet we continue to project ourselves and protect our allies to the tune of \$100 billion for Europe, and \$46 billion for Japan and Korea ... a year! While this may not seem much in the larger sense of the entire budget, defense spending still makes up 50% of the discretionary budget!<sup>11</sup> The American people have long taken for

granted the patriotic call to spend on defense when there was reason. Now there is no reason to continue spending as we have been.

The end of the Cold War may not have heralded a global community linked in ideological harmony but it definitely pointed out how the global economy had begun to link itself inextricably together. As the U.S. spent to protect our allies, they spent to grow economically and so became our trading partners, some eventually our trading rivals. They also began to build their own militaries not to threaten us but to insure that they could protect their own interests in case they were at odds with America's interests. By our own strength we began to weaken.

If we agree that our military force today exists to protect our economic interests, then it is only natural we devise a strategy and a force to do so. However, as General John Sheehan, Commander in Chief of Atlantic Command points out: "We have not resolved a very fundamental question: whether the United States is a continental based power with a global reach or is truly a maritime nation with global interests." The force to implement the first strategy is vastly different than that needed to implement the second. Strategy must drive force structure; not structure strategy. However, as General Sheehan notes, "...it appears the issue has been decided by default. We have become a continental power with global reach. Unfortunately, we did not arrive at that decision by careful analysis." Rather it appears we arrived by default at this juncture through a lack

of strategic vision on the part of our political leaders and through inter service rivalry and in-fighting not witnessed since the 1950's.

In the period since the Soviet Bloc has disintegrated, the services have scrambled to dodge the cuts demanded by the American taxpayer. Some have done so more effectively than others and with some cause. Each has argued vehemently for their current force structure (to include keeping the existing multi-echelon headquarters) and to buttress the argument has sought out expanding capabilities to make themselves the "force of choice" or "the nation's 911 Force". The cuts have come in spite of the scrambling. Sensing the services reticence to rely on each other. Congress passed the Goldwaters-Nichols Act of 1986 legislating "jointness" among the services. Seizing on a perceived opportunity to maintain force levels, each service has demanded its own opportunity to act as command and control headquarters for joint operations. These demands resulted in an overabundance of headquarters in every service looking for money, missions and someone or something to command. The implication being that if you cannot do a specific mission, or at least command it, you as a service are in some way inferior to one who can. Consequently, a "CINCDOM" (ACOM) has been mandated to train every CONUSbased numbered Air Force headquarters, every CONUS-based Army Corps headquarters. and the East Coast Fleet and Marine Expeditionary Force headquarters to act as the core of a Joint Headquarters regardless of the probability -- or lack of it -- of a particular headquarters being called upon to perform this mission. One might ask why the West Coast Navy, Marine, and the Pacific Army forces are not involved in this seemingly

worthwhile endeavor. The reason is simple; the Navy Pacific CINC who controls these forces does not believe his forces should be subject to being trained by someone else. His peer competitor in Korea has historically agreed. And they are not alone in jealously guarding their assigned units from another commander's subordination.

Cases in point: One Army corps does not want another to validate the first one's Ready Brigade even though it may be assigned for a prolonged period of time to the other corps for contingency missions; a numbered Air Force will participate in required joint training but only on its terms, not according to the training guidelines outlined in the exercise and evaluation directive, a fleet wants the minimum Army and Air Force forces to round out its deployment workup so it doesn't interfere, but demands their participation to be certified as a joint headquarters, and a MEF wants all the services to ante up personnel to fill a "standing" JTF (Joint Task Force) Headquarters that it decided unilaterally to create. While the services fight these internal and external turf wars the world is passing them by. Large formations commanded by ponderous headquarters are not suited to transnational threats and tribal wars where people -- not technology -- make the difference.

The world of warfare for the U.S. is no longer fought solely in the joint arena but also in the combined and interagency arenas. And while the services can be proud of the progress they have made in formulating plans for such new warfare the formulas still suffer from the original flawed premise of the cold war organizations and roles and missions

claimed by each. While the services hang on for dear life to their current structure, and roles and missions born in the first two world wars, the new world demands leaner forces with smaller, less complex command structures and a higher tooth to tail ratio. The next cuts must be from the top, from the headquarters not the field. If not, if we continue to cut the force structure by cutting combat units and protecting staff structure General Sheehan predicts, "[w]e're going to be the best damn staff to ever get run off the hill." 14

#### **Manic Depression**

I know what I want, but I just don't know how to go about getting it.

Jimi Hendrix

The root cause of the services' manic depressive state may lie in the subliminal meaning of General Sheehan's assessment of our core problem. A continental power connotes a large Army while a maritime power connotes a large Navy. Both can achieve global reach but with different consequences on the other end of the reach. Maritime powers ply their trade globally by sea routes and keep that trade secure through naval power which guarantees freedom of the seas. Continental powers ply their trade by land routes and can count on the army to secure their interests. Where does that leave the United States? The problem may be even more complex than articulated by General Sheehan. The United States is almost a continent in its own right, arguing for a robust Army. But as a continent, the United States has global interests which it must pursue through maritime (and air) trade, arguing for a robust Navy and Air Force. In truth the

United States must secure these interests by land, sea, air and now space forces now and into the foreseeable future.

We started out as a fledgling maritime power protected by the greatest navy in the world: the Royal Navy. We existed under this umbrella until we began to see that our interests were at odds with those of our protector and so we built our own protection.

The British power projection (expeditionary) force — one of Europe's finest — sent to secure the British economic interests was finally defeated by a combination of lean combat forces, both land and sea. We matured into both a great continental and maritime power. We protected our own interests and those of our allies on land with our continental Army in its forward deployed (expeditionary) bases, and at sea with our vast blue water Navy.

The parallel with old the British Empire and today's United States in this respect is startling: a large, economically superior country with a powerful army and navy losing its influence over a onetime friend by being over-extended. Fantasy? Steven Metz posits just such a scenario suggesting that America will grow progressively tired of expensive power projection (maritime operations) and conflict resolution (extended expeditions) to the point where the U.S. will become technologically dependent on our ability to strike an opponent swiftly from the air or sea with little risk of incurring casualties in what he calls "burst" operations. The U.S. is not far from that ability now. Air power, and especially space power, makes this scenario not only possible but also plausible.

One can imagine power projection and expeditionary forces consisting of unmanned arsenal platforms in space and on the oceans launching retaliatory strikes against opponents without a single human ever setting foot on foreign soil! Ultimately, the 'expedition' may consist of pushing a button in the continental United States that sends a weapon streaking to its target, not necessarily a city, but perhaps an individual armored vehicle or command complex. This is a scenario where the tooth to tail ratio is turned absolutely upside down. It takes more headquarters to decide where to target, what and when to launch, and against whom. It takes fewer warriors, fewer humans.

For the most humane reasons we must guard against overreliance on the technological revolution to lead us in the military revolution. The psychological impact of an unseen, unexpected precision strike from the night sky cannot be underplayed. But neither can the long term enmity of the populace against whom the strike is launched. In the long run it may indeed be better for the export of democracy to have boots on the ground instead of fire from the sky. Certainly those on the ground should have the power to wreck havoc on belligerents. But the only resolution to human conflict comes from human contact, not technological drubbing.

Without doubt technology has a very real part in the future of expeditionary forays. It is not the panacea to the current illness suffered by the military. To achieve a real military revolution the services must be willing to ask some very hard, fundamental questions. These questions must address formations built around national strategy

developed from national goals and interests. For the near term and into the foreseeable future our ability to launch expeditions to protect our interests remain absolutely necessary because the alternative is either to do nothing or to import adversaries to our shores to settle differences, neither of which is a satisfactory alternative. Until we open our minds to frank and honest discussion about fundamental reforms and radical restructuring of our national strategy and the armed forces that support it, we appear doomed to launch our forces structured for the wrong war. Until then, we will continue to fool ourselves into thinking we have devised new rules rather than realizing we have merely discovered old ones. Therein we stand the chance of failing by relying on our old strengths.

#### **ENDNOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> Russell F. Weigley, <u>The American Way of War: A History of United States</u> <u>Military Strategy and Policy</u>, 1973, Indiana University Press, pg. xxi.
- <sup>2</sup> Ronald Steel, <u>Temptations of a Superpower</u>, 1995, Harvard University Press, pg. 1.
- <sup>3</sup> Zbigniev Brzezinski, "The Premature Partnership" in <u>Foreign Affairs</u>, Vol. 73, No. 2, pp. 67-82. March/April 1994.
- <sup>4</sup> See for example the Army's cornerstone doctrinal publication FM 100-5 Operations June 1993: "Army operations doctrine builds on the collective knowledge and wisdom gained through recent conduct of operations -- combat as well as operations other than war -- numerous exercises, and the deliberate processing of informed reasoning throughout the Army." pg. iv.
  - <sup>5</sup> Ibid. pp. xiii-xxv.
- <sup>6</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, National Military Strategy of the United States of America: A Strategy of Flexible and Selective Engagement, 1995, pg. ii.
- <sup>7</sup> The White House, <u>A national Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement</u>, February, 1996, 15.
  - <sup>8</sup> Ronald Steel, <u>Temptations of a Superpower</u>, pg. 45.
  - <sup>9</sup> Ibid. 14.
- Navy. Vistica argues the intelligence reports clearly showed the Russian armed forces, in particular the Russian Navy, were defensive in nature by their organization. Vistica argues the truth was known to the top military (CNO) and civilian (Secretary of the Navy) leaders in the U.S. yet was manipulated by these men and hidden in favor of building a 600 ship navy.
  - <sup>11</sup> Steel, 60.

- 12 Sheehan, pg. 48.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Steven Metz, "Strategic Horizons: Speculations on the Future Security System" 4 October 1996. pp. 20-24.

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